


Chicka Hanka

African American Folk Song

Call



Cap-tain, go side - track your train!

Response

SINGING

This is a great call and response song with the call being the part of the train-yard supervisor and the response being the sound of the train. Introduce the response by having the children practice saying the “chicka hanka” part, articulating to imitate a train sound. Next the teacher can speak the call in rhythm with students coming in at the appropriate time on response. Discuss the lyrics of the song at this time. (In a train station the trains were moved to sidetracks to make room for arriving trains.) Then have them sing the response on E pitch while playing the pitch on bell or piano. Next the teacher can sing the call while students sing response. When the melody is known, divide class into two groups and eventually have soloists sing the call. Let the “supervisor” use a megaphone so they can sing louder without vocal strain. A picture of a conductor’s hat to represent the call and a picture of a train to represent the response help the children keep track of where they are in the song.

PLAYING

Add instrumental accompaniment to the song: Sandblocks can play a quarter note pattern of Sh sh sh sh while maracas, egg shakers, or cabasas play an eighth note pattern ch-ch ch-ch ch-ch ch-ch. Add a train whistle playing at random intervals. An autoharp Em chord can be strummed on the half note beats. You can also invite students to move about the room stepping on the beat while they sing the song. The children enjoy lining up in sets of four traveling about the room like mini trains. At the end of the song a student blows the train whistle and the “engine” moves to the back of the set to become the caboose and you sing again. For an added challenge, give the students egg shakers and have them play eighth notes while stepping the quarter note beat.

CREATING

Have the children experiment with different sounds that they might hear in a busy train station...clank, rattle, whoosh, choo, clickity clack, puff, etc. These can be vocal sounds and found sounds. Encourage them to explore high/low, loud/soft and short/long sounds. Let them work in groups to put together a sound piece. There are many other train chants/songs like “Engine, engine, number nine”, “Clickity, clickity, clack”, “Down by the Station”. These could be put in a sequence and mixed with the experimental sounds or instruments to create a “Train Suite”.

LISTENING

As children create and share their sound pieces, invite them to analyze each other’s work. Encourage them to discuss the musical and expressive features of what they hear as well as stating what they did or didn’t like. There are classical train pieces that provide good listening lessons, such as “The Little Train of Caipira,” by Villa-Lobos.

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION (Language arts, drama)

Our expression getting “sidetracked” comes from the railroad workers. To enhance the concept of sidetracking trains, help the children dramatize their “people trains” entering the train station. Some get “sidetracked” while others come down the main line. Encourage them to shuffle feet and add train sound effects. There are train books to share with the students, especially The Little Engine That Could by Platt and Munk. While telling the story, divide the class into the four train groups from the story and assign a chant to each group. Other books are Freight Train by Donald Crew and Mr. Little Train’s Noisy Train by Richard Fowler